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Sirens of the shoreline

Eugene Nieminen A.

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SIRENS OF THE SHORELINE

BY

Eugene A. Nieminen

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

MFA IMAGING ARTS PROGRAM
SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES
ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK
March 28, 1990

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Title of Thesis: *Sirens of the Shoreline*

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March 28, 1990
To my wife

Barbara S. (Taano) Nieminen

Grow old along with me!
The best is yet to be,
When our time has come
We will be as one
God bless our Love...

-JOHN LENNON Milk and Honey
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INTRODUCTION

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

I will explore the shoreline of the Great Lakes through my senses, inner thoughts, memory, physical self, and the photographic process. The resulting work will be a combination of spirituality, man's industry, and nature.

The photographic show Sirens of the Shoreline was produced as a partial requirement for the M.F.A. degree in Imaging Arts at the Rochester Institute of Technology. I thank my board members for their time, expertise, and comments.

This report examines my evaluation of the thesis process and the thesis show I produced. I am expressing in the reader my inner thoughts connected with the photographic show Sirens of the Shoreline. In addition I will discuss comments I have received on the show.

Hindsight is a post thesis ritual. I can now see changes I would have made to the original show. The ability to look back with hindsight is a very plastic condition. There are many influences upon an artist/student. I found the process of developing a photographic show to be very personal. It became a pious act; my reaction to the subject matter was deeper than I expected. While I have always had a respect for the lake and its many uses, with my photography I pay homage to the lakeshore.

Appendix One details the technical considerations I encountered producing a thesis show.
Appendix Three contains images from the show and views of the gallery installation. There are many more images for which there is neither time nor space. This may be an imperfection on my part: the desire to say too much, to show it all. The Installation photographs give an indication of the layout and display of the actual show.
I find it easier to hear compliments and harder to discern criticism. Perhaps this discrimination is human and requires attention by all artists. Viewers of art tend to praise work they like and ignore that which does not reach them. Board members, fellow students and others give their opinions on the content of the work. Their opinions are expressed in relation to their experiences. One of my initial goals at the start of the thesis project was to understand the cause, the reason for my work. The work is an extension of my feelings toward a vast body of water. Even though my father sailed the lakes for over thirty years, I had never made any trips by ore freighter. In photographing this work I retraced what I had remembered to be a seducing life style. I found men like my father aboard the ships of today. They spoke of their families; they discussed the routine of traveling the lakes. I found traveling the lakes to be a business; here on Tuesday, there on Thursday, with demands from the head office. A comparison of sailing the lakes is like driving to work, you have to be there on time, your take the same route, and what you see on the way is the same scenery. The distinction was the scenery; it approached a spiritual quality. Crew members aboard the ships shared my interest in the elements of nature and the spirit of the lakes.
I intend to organize opinions of my show, *Sirens of the Shoreline*. I now have the opinions of faculty, students, friends and family to place the show in perspective. Reviews of the work include praise and criticism. Events and opinions after the show have influenced my estimation of the experience. I found it to be a personal experience to plan, produce, edit, and hang a show.

Building and presenting a show in photography is a personal endeavor. I shot most of the negatives alone; I worked in the darkroom alone; I alone decided what images I would see. My consciousness was occupied with negatives, contacts, and work prints. I did generate work for fellow students and board members to view. I sought out the opinions of trusted friends. Yet the thesis and the effect of the work had to represent my convictions. My intentions encompass a viewer, for whom I provide *Sirens of the Shoreline*. The viewer is invited to share personal experiences within the limits of my shoreline. I capture the moment aboard the deck of a freighter on Whitefish Bay (fig. 6). A passing freighter is dwarfed by the massive hot pink deck hatches. The viewer is drawn onto the deck, where there might even be the roll of the ship underfoot. I can feel the moving ship under my feet when viewing such prints; large 90 inch prints facilitate such experiences.
PART TWO

INSPIRATION FROM CHILDHOOD

Having grown up in a port city inspires me in particular ways. I was born and raised in the harbor of Ashtabula, Ohio. I was born in 1951; my father had already been sailing the seven seas and the Great Lakes for fifteen years. Throughout the 1950’s and 1960’s our family was involved with the names of ships and ports of the Great Lakes. Mother brothers and I would travel by train to Cleveland, Toledo, Buffalo, and similar cities where my father’s ore boat put in. (Lake freighters are called ore boats by the people of this geographical area.)

In 1951 conventional ore boats burned coal for steam, had been built in the World War I era, and were three hundred to five hundred feet long. They belched black smoke over the river, docked in the slips, and anchored off the Ashtabula light house. Ore boats would lay-to outside of the breakwall off the lighthouse. At times a dozen boats could be seen anchored near the mouth of the harbor. The docks worked around the clock to unload boats full of iron ore. Cities like Cleveland and Buffalo had them tied up three abreast at the ore docks. A visit to my father’s boat in Cleveland might last for days while the boat waited to be unloaded. In Cleveland, the taxi ride started downtown at the bustling railroad terminal, zigzagged through foul steel mills, foundries, huge shovels, derricks, and ended at the docks. The docks were dominated by huge turn of the century hullet machines. An operator would ride the hullet’s huge
shovel down into the hold of the ore boat. It emerged with several tons of iron ore within its grasp. We had to walk under these huge structures to board my father’s boat. Ore, a deep dark rust red color which soon covers everything, rained down on our heads and soiled our clothes.

As a child of two, I lived next door to a house owned by the United States Government. This home was for use by the Chief of the Coast Guard Station and his family. I remember the uniforms of the chief and his crew. The image of the Coast Guard personnel had a far reaching impact on my life. The actual Coast Guard Station was at the bottom of the hill, across the river from the house. I could see the station and quarters from our living room window. I still see my mental image of the scene.

My first memories include mental images of myself, including views of the windows I gazed from. Some of these early childhood memories are like out-of-body experiences. In these mental images I remember seeing myself viewing the harbor from the window. It is as if I had raised a camera and snapped a photo of myself, like seeing from two vantage points.

The work in the show is akin to viewing out a window. The work shows the shoreline through my eyes. I provide a window for the viewer to share my images of the shoreline. At times part of the image wants to exist outside of the frame. The surface of the print does not restrict many of the massive steel and stone subjects.
At two and three years my perception of the world expanded beyond the window, down the hill to the river, and the lake. All the visual activity was matched by audio. There were tug boats, ore boats, fishing boats, etc. The noise would call me to the window. It might be the blast of a ship's whistle, or the low beating throb of a huge ore freighter's steam engine on the river. Particularly memorable was a siren on the draw bridge which warned the auto traffic to stop so the bridge could raise. The bridge opened to allow ships to pass beneath on their way to the shipyard. Even today this siren still causes me to stop and view the bridge's opening.

During the steel boom days of the 1950's these were the sights and sounds of the river and lake outside my window. World War Two was over; the Korean War now demanded steel, as did an American economy built on such consumer goods as, refrigerators, new cars, washers, and driers. These sights and sounds influenced me thirty years ago as they do now. My young self and the life I knew in the harbor will always be present in my memories. Sitting in our car waiting for the lift bridge was a common occurrence. Watching the huge freighters float under the open bridge was like waiting for a train. Once as we waited, watching the passing ship, a man from the deck of the ship waving at our car. It was my father. There were surprises, schedules changed, and one thing remained constant--the ships. The ships had a life to them, a special kind of life. Ships breathed steam and black coal smoke. From the bowels of the ships iron
ore was lifted out by huge dinosaur-like machines. Railroad cars rolled and slammed into one another, adding thunder to the whine of steel machines and engines, to the shrill call of the siren.
PART THREE

TIME AND ENERGY

Things change over thirty some years. Presently, Ashtabula harbor is quiet except for the charter boats which ply the lake in search of walleye and perch. If an ore boat passes under the lift bridge it is on its last voyage; on the way to the scrap yard, the cutter’s torch. The ship yard is a pleasure boat marina, the dry dock will never be dry again.

There are various small pleasure craft streaking over the water. Only an occasional freighter of coal, ore, or stone approaches the harbor. The new freighters stretch three times the size of the old ore boats. The ships today are of a new generation. The crews are a new generation of Great Lakes sailors. Yet the life style remains the same. I had never sailed on the ore freighters before photographing for this thesis project.

I had always wanted to make a trip aboard an ore freighter, yet there were restrictions prohibiting children from making a trip. My mother would be away for weeks at a time aboard the ship with my father. My brothers and I would stay with grandparents or cousins. We would receive color post cards of the various ports the ship visited. These cards added visual images to the epic we imagined aboard an ore boat. We would visit the boat in port and at times the boat would move up the river or be repositioned at the dock. The moving ship was a fascination to me and my younger brothers. I now realize that the
shooting of this thesis show and the trip aboard the freighter with my wife was a
completion of the experience I had only imagined. Speaking with my parents
about the trip initiated a conversation of the events they experienced. Things
have not changed over thirty years; ships are bigger, the crews are new, but the
experience remains the same. I found that the pleasures I encountered such as
standing on the bow watching the shoreline was the same pastime my parents
enjoyed. The large meals and dinning room conversations with the captain were
an event I could never had experienced as a child. When visiting my father’s
boat as children we ate at the captain’s table; now the experience has come full
circle. I was not disappointed nor was I disillusioned by the my trip aboard the
freighter.

In my home town the Coast Guard Station is still in use: still sitting on
the river, down the hill from where I once lived. The house next door is no
longer used by the Coast Guard Chief and his family. It is now a Great Lakes
Museum. The museum is filled with artifacts and photographs of my childhood
harbor, and a harbor years before I knew it.

Spending time along the lake shore produces an energy within me.
Storms and arctic conditions produce a sense of being; I hear myself breathe, I
see my frozen breath; and hear my own footsteps. At other times all elements
of life are swept away by the noise of surf and wind. This leaves me alone with
my subject, the shoreline.
I decided to follow the seasons of the Great Lakes. If I had to settle on a particular season, winter would be my choice. The hard ice, cold steel hulls, and snow squalls place me at ease.

The commotion of summer releases the cold frozen containment of winter. Summer calls people to the lake: freighters work, swimmers play, fishermen ply the surface of the water. During the summer recreation is in full swing. Night life abounds along boardwalks, in boutiques, and lakeside nightclubs. Summer produces a totally different shoreline from the freeze of winter.

The viewer of Sirens of the Shoreline must accompany me down to the water’s edge. Will the viewer ignore the life connected to this body of water called the Great Lakes? Life is there in the machines, life in awe of surf and storm. Life exists in the growing and dying industries, and the birth and decline of huge machines. The newest machines--thousand foot freighters--dock near abandoned 90 year old steel skeletons of hullet machines. The shoreline has a life of its own. It grows new, grows old, dies, and regrows in another area.

Viewers of the panoramic color prints might experience a sense of vast, huge, industrial landscapes. Other prints convey a serene, peaceful, and beautiful view of the shoreline. Another aspect of the show includes pleasure boats and converted landscapes, landscapes converted from a sinful environment of smoke, cinder, foul steel mills and foundries into lakefront and riverside
marinas. There is a sinful lust for $100,000 boats, pleasure, and expensive riverside reservations for berthing.

At the onset of this thesis project I was primarily interested in my childhood memories of the shoreline. Old and new photographs have made me aware of changes in my home town. There have been vast changes in my thirty some years of memory. Yet in my mind all seemed the same. My exploration of the shoreline was not intended to be a history of Great Lakes shipping. I researched Great Lakes Museums and found old images of the way life used to be. I returned to locations of my youth. I recalled memories of my youth growing up along the shoreline.

Time is a strange thing; I wonder if it really exists. We place ourselves within a framework of time; we measure its passing. In describing my perceived relationship with the shoreline, I was documenting time with the camera. In searching out circumstances of my childhood I found the past was still there. It was gone, but there; changed, but the same. By fixing time in place with my camera I have delineated time.

I have always been at ease with the lake. I feel at ease on a beach in summer’s heat or on winter’s ice. Surfing twenty foot waves during a late fall snow storm seems natural to me. Swimming and surfing in the open lake is freedom to me. Fear is what enters and unsettles my composure, fear helps me survive. There are many situations where fear enters our lives. There is fear in
taking a chance. Confidence provides us with a path we know we can take. Stepping out of known limits we experience fear. Complacency prevents an artist from taking chances. Surfers don’t drop onto rocks because doing so is new; they avoid unknown waters. At the start of this thesis project I felt confident of my abilities and understanding of the subject matter. In the process of editing and examining what I produced uncertainty entered my thoughts. I like so many students expressed a need to change what I was doing. My character and background do not allow me to succumb to uncertainty. As a major in the U.S. Marine Corps I have to make decisions and find a course of action to complete the mission. Task orientation is a trait I live with; it influences my art work. In completing this thesis project I realized many other things I could accomplish with the material. I enclose samples of work in the appendix which are not in the show. The reader is permitted to see out-takes of my final edited show.

During my exploration of the shoreline, I responded to the lure of the past. Was it a romantic view of the early fifties? Memories have a way of being glossed over; it was easy to shine dull and dirty objects of my childhood.

My earliest memories clearly focus objects with a life of their own--at least I felt they were alive. I found my existence connected to a life within machines and structures of the shore line. The ships I found were alive; the steel hulls
had a life within them. The massive works of iron and steel were as they had been: alive.

The piles of ore and stone set on the docks by these ships had a distinctive quality to me. They represented a manmade landscape, manmade mountains of stone. Sitting next to these mountains were the huge ships, manmade giants of iron and steel, powered by huge diesel engines. The people working these ships seemed to me a rather insignificant aspect of the landscape. It seemed the workers were secondary to the soul of the machines. The show reflects this fact; people are but a small part of the image. There is one narrative photograph in the show, the policeman and woman on the beach. (fig. 2) This image contains a police officer at the beach talking to a young woman in her car. There are many stories in that image. I see the steel mills on the horizon, and the surface of the lake. Gunther Cartwright sees the narrative of the human encounter, the uneasy expression of the woman’s face and the pointing finger of the policeman. In the background there are bathers and boats in the water. There are many events happening on the beach area. Young boys talk to girls, old men sit and rest, children play, and much more. The skyline of Buffalo, N.Y. is seen in the distant, it stands a quarter inch tall on an eight foot long print. In the image: near Buffalo, there are steel mills and clouds of white smoke. What the viewer can not see in this image is (fig. 7) the grain docks in Buffalo. In this image of grain silos and freighter people are reduced to one
quarter inch tall on an eight foot print. The viewer has to explore the dock and ship for crew members. Many years ago human beings built these massive structures; soon this will be scrap. This ship is short enough to make the trip up the Buffalo River to the silos, the new freighters are too long to pass through bends in the river. In a few short years this area too will be pleasure boat marinas as in (fig. 8). The sail boats and other pleasure craft are sharing the industrial landscape. This view is just off the Buffalo River, the grain silos and freighter are examples of a bygone industry. Grain is now transported over super highways in trucks; there is no need to build new grain ships.
At the onset of the summer of 1988 I had approval to proceed with my thesis. The work I had done to this point had been during the winter and spring. Due to the build up of ice, shipping on the Great Lakes ceases during the winter. Ships are laid-up in various ports. Crews go home, leaving only a ship’s watch until spring. That winter seven ships laid up in my home town. Three of them were among the newest and largest ships on the lakes; thousand foot freighters. These ships are as long as an aircraft carrier. Included was the DeLancey (fig. 1), the largest ship on the Great Lakes. I photographed the DeLancey floating high on the Ashtabula River. I did not include this photograph in the show, although the image contains strong symbols to me of what a ship is. A ship is covered by a skin as is a human. It also has it’s face painted. She is tranquil as if in surgery, being repaired during her winter sleep. The ships ballast tanks had been pumped dry so workmen could enter to paint and do maintenance. The thousand foot ship was floating on a foot of ice-covered water. Her deck was fifty feet off the surface of the ice. She seemed to be floating lighter than air; like a blimp. The ice on the river created a surreal surface for the ship to settle on. The exposed mass of the ship and the perspective of the wide angle lens gave the DeLancey a vast and massive appearance. Yet she looks light enough to float off the frame.
Two other thousand footers are shown laid up side by side; the Mesabi Miner and the James Barker. The two ships were photographed in the setting sun of winter. During the five minute exposure the sun dropped below the cold horizon. The light bulbs aboard the ships add to a feeling that the ships are alive. There is stillness, but the ships seem to have a quality of life. The giant ships seem to be sleeping. The pile of iron ore to the left of the ships rises up, a manmade mountain of ore from the entrails of the Earth, carried from northern mines in the bowels of huge, cavernous ships. These mountains of ore give some scale to the huge ships.

Another photograph I used in the thesis show includes the sunrise view of the lighthouse and breakwall (fig. 3). The patterns on the ice create another environment. The clouds of a passing snow squall add a similar pattern to the sky. The fury of the sky and the patterns of the ice are cut by the lines of the stone breakwalls. These man-made projections of stone slice the natural qualities of the ice. The geometric patterns of the ice are slashed and contrasted against the cut stone breakwalls. The breakwalls project into the image as a frame line in an attempt to contain the composition. Miles of cut stone laid into the water of the lake, now frozen in place as solid as concrete.

During the early summer of 1988 I explored the shoreline from Rochester, New York to Cleveland, Ohio, photographing many beaches and vacation resorts. Many of the photographs have the appearance of "chamber of commerce" shots.
With swimmers and beach front amusement parks, they are ready for a brochure, or post card.

This is where the thesis proposal I had envisioned was split into three or four different theses. The views of the lake and shoreline could be eight foot postcards. Harry Izenour suggested that I screenprint postcard graphics and a postmark on the backs of the prints, writing messages on the back for viewers of the show, displaying the work so the viewer could walk around the piece and read the words.

There are many possibilities I could have pursued. There is the narrative of the life style around the lake, exploring bars and arcades utilizing the human element. There are the spiritual aspects of my exploration. An image I did not use in the show, to the disappointment of my board members, was of the water. It was taken from a porthole on the bow of a lake freighter. The two vertical images show the bow wake spraying from the port and starboard side of the hull. The long exposure captures the moving spray and wake. The two prints mounted together with the fans of water spraying off to the sides of the spliced print. The image produces what Charles Werberig described as a spiritual quality. The life I searched for in nature and manmade machines is approached in this mode of image. There are similar wave and storm surf photographs that I chose not to use. I explained earlier that I felt the need to accomplish the mission I had set out upon. I could have changed my thesis at many
opportunities. Part of the thesis procedure is planning a show and completion of all the details. I became aware of my work in relation to my peers, and my work in the modern photographic art world. There are pieces from my thesis work which did not fit into the show I had scheduled in the R.I.T. gallery. Now in hindsight I can discipline myself to learn from the total experience.

Glenn Miller suggested utilizing images such as the spliced-bow-wave image. One idea was to process enough copies of the pair to cover a small wall or panel, making every other pair a mirror image of the previous. The viewer must decide at which level to interpret the work. As a whole the pattern of nature knows no left or right, a pair, or a single image. There is freedom in the spraying water; it is as timeless as any wave.

Each deviation from the original thesis would have been sufficient to complete an exploration of the shoreline. Each of the possible paths could have occupied my attention for years. Foundations for future exploration are rooted in my original thesis proposal. Future work will utilize discoveries I made in this thesis research.

The thesis proposal I started with became too vast to comprehend in a single show. There are many examples of a common usage of the shoreline by recreation and industry. Many unsuccessful images I made were of streets and boardwalks along the lake front. Arcades, burger joints, amusement parks, and beach shops create a vacationer’s world. As I photographed these sites, I felt
the show approaching completion. In reality, upon viewing the contact sheets I was disappointed. I felt the subject matter and resulting prints did not integrate with other work I had produced. This street photography did not relate to the thesis show I wanted to present. The images of shops and beach front arcades lacked meaningful content. These images are similar to ones made by many students experimenting with a panoramic camera.

Summer images of recreation used in the show include a dock on the Cuyahoga River in downtown Cleveland, Ohio, (fig. 4). There are a group of expensive pleasure boats docked in Cleveland at a riverside nightclub/restaurant. In the background is Conrail bridge number one, a mass of black steel girders spanning the river. Passing under the raised bridge are sightseeing boats and water taxis.

The vantage point of figure 5, is from inside, looking out the window of the nightclub/restaurant. The open glass structure allows for undisturbed viewing of the river. Through the glass walls the Conrail bridge is visible, its steel frame work is a complementing structure to the restaurant's. There is a strong geometric pattern of iron bridge and frame lines of the huge windows in the restaurant. As people eat and talk, the river and all its activity flow by. The print on the wall is a window from which we can study the events of a summer afternoon.
In a lot of my work there is a containment of space; space contained in a ship, an open frozen harbor, or a restaurant. At times I want to create a massive solid object from the surface of the photograph. I want to confront the viewer with massive steel and iron. An example is a close up of the side of a ship’s hull, not used in the show. The red hull of the ship is seen in close-up detail and seen off in the distance also. Detail is there to describe the texture and mass of the ship. The size of the print conveys the scale of the ship. The print is open for the viewer to scrape the drips of paint off the ship’s hull.

It was on the decks of these ships that I felt a bond to the subject matter. The huge steel structures, like so many rusting dinosaurs, possess a life within them.

My interest in the old style ore boats prompted me to contact a shipping company in Cleveland, Ohio, to inquire about a trip on an older style boat to the upper Great Lakes. I was offered a trip on the Charles M. Beeghly. She was built in 1959, in Toledo, Ohio, originally 710 feet long, 75 feet wide and 37 foot high; she was lengthened to 806 feet in 1972 by adding a new 96 foot section. This lengthening was done in the early 1970’s to keep her competitive with new and larger ships. She was one of the last of the twin cabin types to be built. I inform you of these details to illustrate that as time goes by ships also grow and change like a living being.
Since the sixties, nearly all new Great Lakes ship construction has been of the single rear cabin design. The new ships resemble oil tankers, not the distinctive ore boats of my youth.

The trip aboard the Charles M. Beeghly introduced a different view of ships, docks and men of the Great Lakes. A week aboard an ore boat places one in a different relationship to a mariner’s lifestyle. After the trip I saw the ships differently. I had experienced the travel and life style of a Great Lakes sailor. The human component became an intrinsic part of the ship.

I was intrigued by the huge loading machines at the ore dock in Michigan. The loading dock in Marquette, Michigan sits at the edge of Lake Superior. The trees and hills seem to roll right into the water. The city is situated in a little valley on the shoreline of Lake Superior. The docks are far to the West of the city, tucked into the edge of the wilderness. A small pleasure boat marina shares this edge of shoreline. The area is a combination of man’s industry, spirituality, and nature. Time permitting I could have done the entire show on this area. This panoramic became a four panel piece in my show. It was the entry piece as viewers entered the gallery.

Charles Werberig made a comment that the entry piece in my show contained all the elements of my thesis proposal, see the fold out (fig. 9 and fig. 10). The three panel panoramic covers 270 degrees, from west to east.
A viewer walking into the gallery first sees a small pleasure boat marina. Next to it was a view south, which shows the lake and early morning sun breaking through the storm clouds. To the east the third panel continued the lake, the ship’s stern, and an edge of the ore loading dock. The fourth panel (fig. 10) was larger, and vertical. The top of this 90"x30" vertical stood ten feet off the floor, two men add some scale to the loading dock. Two workmen are tucked into the middle of the massive rusty structure, standing at the edge of the chute.

The image covers man’s transformation of nature’s domain, his recreational, spiritual, and industrial use of the lake.
CONCLUSION

In conclusion, there was one period during my exploration of the Great Lakes shoreline which endorsed my original statement of purpose. This was the trip by ore freighter to the ore docks of upper Michigan. The four print panoramic (fig. 9 & 10) could have been the entire show. I could have placed it in the gallery and fulfilled the objective of the statement of purpose. My statement of purpose could have been placed in foot large lettering on a gallery wall. The combination of written statement and the panoramic piece could have been quite effective.

The thesis show I presented in the Fine Art Photography Gallery at R.I.T. could have been three different shows. Utilizing hindsight I can now mold a more effective show. At the present I am in an advantageous position for editing my past work. Being away from the work and engaging in various actives has cleared my head; enabling me to better understand what I have accomplished, and what is still required.

I intend, however to discuss the actual situation, not what might have been. It is my conclusion that returning the next fall would have been a nice option. A year is a short time to investigate and produce a show of this scale. No matter how I planned and coordinated, time slipped by. As a graduate student my time was crammed with completing class requirements, hours spent as gallery supervisor for my graduate assistantship, obtaining money, and many
other time consuming situations. Time did not exist for weekly or daily meetings with my thesis board. The meetings I did have produced many ideas and helped shape my perception of the work I was producing. The fact is I had to produce the show; I had to print, mount, edit, and hang it—and live with my decisions. There was no going back; we learn as we live.

I grew up in Ashtabula harbor during the peak years of Great Lakes shipping. Record tonnages of freight passed over the surface of the Great Lakes. I could look at the lake and see four or five ore boats at any time, day or night. I revisited the locations of my childhood and photographed the present world. I brought the shoreline into the gallery, where viewers were allowed the opportunity to stand on the deck of a freighter. The prints I hung on the walls followed my statement of purpose.

I filled the entire gallery with large eight foot, five foot, and three foot prints. The selection of images in the editing process makes a vast difference in the finished show. What I said with my editing was "Here is my shoreline; I like this part of the world."

Many people have told me they loved the experience of the show; they loved the large images. Yet there are some like Jeff Weiss who said "You blew it... you could have had a dynamite show... too much, too many... what was it all about?" I now see where I followed my statement of purpose too closely.
There are people who have said, "You could have had even more work on the gallery walls." "Hang the prints double on the wall, I would like more." Many comments stated, "It's like being there!"

I wanted to route the viewer along the shoreline through a variety of images. I feel I used too much material. The show was tightly contained by the space; it felt constricted. The gallery space should have been more open; I might have used only one quarter of the prints. This reduction would have allowed the gallery to be more open and spacious, but editing the show down to fewer prints would have transformed my thesis.

I found that I could not please everyone! Current versions of the show have been scaled down. Galleries in which I am showing do not have the capacity for huge prints. Large amounts of large work have this problem. The physical space of the gallery and the editing process are so important. I now feel it is better to show three prints in a small space, than to squeeze in too many.

As a learning experience the thesis show contributed to my education at R.I.T.. I received critical comments and a considerable number of compliments. Students and faculty alike would stop me and praise the show. A lot of good came out of the experience. The most important comments were the constructive criticism. Negative comments have influenced my continuous self appraisal.
I hung what I felt best represented my encounter with my subject matter and my past. The show was my exploration of both my past and present. Research and study opened my eyes to many new ideas. When I was hanging the show I could have modified the editing and departed from my statement of purpose. There is nothing wrong with altering a statement of purpose or a show. What I have determined to be inappropriate is to exhibit the same show again. Days after hanging the show, I saw many different ways to present the material. Learning from experience is a fact of life. It is also something I learned from the shoreline: Things keep changing.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX ONE

TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My involvement with the panoramic format was a consequence of the subject matter I photographed. In the Fall of 1987 I experimented with panoramic photography, examining circuit cameras, Widelux and the Fuji panoramic 6x17. Black and white work directed me toward the Fuji 6x17, as it has a full range of shutter speeds. The Widelux was limited to a few shutter speeds. I found its distortion of the horizon objectionable. Many people make use of the curved horizon line, I avoided the effect. Circuit cameras were hard to obtain and film was in limited supply. Circuit cameras, like the Widelux, must be absolutely level to avoid the distortion of the horizon. I did not desire the fish effect produced by these cameras.

Working with the Fuji 6x17 allowed the use of 120 roll film. The frame was 6 by 17 centimeters in size. The actual image area was 2 inches by 6 3/4 inches, slightly more than a three to one ratio. The problem I encountered was how to print the large negative. I used the 10" by 10" enlargers, with glass negative holders. Dust on the surfaces of the glass and the negative was a major concern. Determining what size of enlargement to produce presented its problems. Up to this time I had been printing progressively larger prints. Most work was black and white, printed on 8 by 10 paper. I felt the images needed
color. Early B&W panoramic prints of beaches and playgrounds were a disappointment.

Most artists do not want to be bothered by technical problems. The technical aspect just gets in the way. I felt that I did not want to be slowed down by poor technique. Nor did I desire to reinvent the wheel every time I wanted to print, mat, or frame a finished image. A variety of print sizes, I soon discovered, was expensive and time consuming. Storage, transportation, matting, and framing for exhibition became significant problems. I could not carry a wide variety of sizes without rolling the mass of prints together, then dealing with the assorted coiled prints. Prints were damaged, mats were cut and unusable for the next print, and dark room exposures varied extremely.

Working with color negative and transparency film, I had to decide on a print size. I had been haphazardly printing sizes I thought looked good. I tried 3 by 9 inch on 8 by 10 inch paper, 3 1/2 by 10 1/2 inch on 11 inch paper, etc. The open space of the shoreline seemed to work better in a larger image. Small detail was confined by the wide angle lens and the small print. I used 11 by 14 inch paper allowing two prints per sheet. The image size was 4 by 12 inches, with a white border.

I investigated all the major suppliers of color photographic paper and found uncomplicated availability of Kodak color paper. Eastman Kodak offered the widest ranges of sizes and surfaces. Determining the general look of the
show, the sizes, and the print surface all had to be based on available products. Photographic manufacturers do not supply a fine art color paper. Sizes and surfaces are directed toward photo finishing plants. I purchased a roll of paper, 11 inch by 275 feet "N" surface, Ektacolor Plus Paper. I continued to make the 4 by 12 inch images by splitting the 11 inch width in half.

I then produced 10 by 30 inch color prints on 11 inch wide paper. The results impressed me enough to purchase a roll of 20 inch paper. Next I undertook the challenge of printing to 20 by 60 inches. Where I ran into another technical problem.

The problem I encountered with printing color to 20 by 60 inches was that the enlarger would not elevate high enough. The 10" by 10" inch enlarger to the ceiling produced only 12 by 36 inches. I placed a right angle front surface mirror under the enlarger lens. This mirror reflected the enlarger's beam across the darkroom allowing the wall to be used as a surface for hanging the photographic paper. With the standard 300mm enlarger lens beaming across the darkroom, I achieved a 20 by 60 inch print. I overcame light spillage from the enlarger, reciprocity of the paper, burning and dodging, and other problems. I supported the mirror at the correct position under the enlarger. The adjustment of the parallax achieved a rectangular image on the print rather than a parallelogram. Focusing an enlarger eight feet from the paper was a problem. I
soon figured ways around the production problems and was ready to produce work.

The next problem I encountered was keeping a white border around the finished print. I was printing the full negative leaving a very thin black frame line defining the edge of the negative. I had to determine strict print sizes for the easels I was building. For an easel, foam core board was my first choice, light, inexpensive, and easy to work. I cut a mat of foam core to place on the paper during exposure. What I ended up with was a hinged window mat constructed of foam core in which I hung the raw paper. This easel stood on the floor supported by a small chair. I was able to move the easel to achieve the size I desired.

The sizes I settled on were:
4 by 12 inch, work prints.
9 by 28 inch, on 11 inch roll paper.
16 by 48 inch, on 20 inch roll paper.
28 by 85 inch, on 30 inch roll paper.

I soon found the 9 by 28 inch size to be very successful. The same effort was required to make a 4 by 12 inch print as a 9 by 28 inch. The 9 by 28 inch print worked well with the subject matter. I was able to work with two sizes of roll paper, two exposure times and filter packs.

With long printing exposures the printing filtration changed due to reciprocity. To print on the twenty inch paper the mirror was required.
Exposures times up to 1500 seconds and the mirror's surface affected the printing filter packs. I kept exposure times for larger and smaller prints similar by varying F stops on the enlarger lens.

The 9 by 28 inch easel was soon in need of repair, foam core is soft, and easily dented. I constructed an easel of aluminum strips with a plywood base board. Using thumb screws I was able to make a small adjustment of the blades. This allowed me to set a perfectly even black border around the image. This border varied from one eighth inch to just under a sixteenth of an inch.

Soon I was printing with and without the black frame line. The finished show did not have black frame lines around the images only small white border.

Soon I was able to produce work for the thesis proposal review board’s evaluation. My thesis proposal was approved and I started production of the show. I purchased film in bulk for the thesis project. This kept another variable under control, film lot emulsion difference. I decided on Kodak color negative film, which I bought in bricks and kept in the deep freeze. I used Kodak Vericolor Professional High Contrast (VHC) for the majority of the work. It’s 100 ISO was a limiting factor. Early morning and sunset hours required the use of Kodak Vericolor Professional II Long Exposure (VPL). The addition of Kodak Vericolor Professional High Speed provided me with the ability to hand hold many shots. Film was kept frozen until use, allowed to reach ambient temperature, used, re-sealed, and re-frozen after exposure. I processed the film
as soon as possible. In warm weather I used a standard picnic cooler for field use. Winter conditions with a wind chill of thirty below zero kept the film nice and cool.

I constructed museum type cases for the finished prints. I determined what size box should hold each print size. Using plywood, bass wood and museum quality hardware. The finished cases were covered with a vinyl material. The cases were lined with white acid free board to prevent contamination of the prints. I constructed paper board and mylar folders for each print. The enclosures prevent damage to the prints during production, evaluation and storage. I Used nonbuffered white box board, 5 mill mylar, and double sticky tape. The bottom and left side of the enclosure were sealed. This allowed prints to be inserted under the mylar and viewed without removal. Encapsulating a print under mylar sealed out dirt, grease and scratches.

Starting school in the Fall of 1988 I discovered that R.I.T. had obtained a thirty inch color processor. I proceeded to print 28 by 85 inch prints, onto thirty inch paper. This size required me to purchase a 210 mm enlarger lens. The 210 mm lens combined with a right angle mirror projected a larger image.

I constructed a vertical easel for 20 inch and 30 inch roll paper. It was constructed with a wooden backboard, aluminum blades, and pop riveted together. I installed a piano hinge on the left vertical side allowing the aluminum blade frame to open and close. This worked like a storm door. The
aluminum frame would open; I would hang the paper on the wooden backing then secure the frame with magnetic catches. The completed easel assembly reached from floor to ceiling, standing eight feet tall. The entire easel was moved to size and compose the print. The negative and enlarger remained stationary. Focussing was achieved by two cords which were secured to the enlargers focusing knob. I could stand eight feet from the enlarger and focus with my nose close to the projected image.

Later 30 by 90 inch museum type box was constructed and covered with black vinyl and lined with acid free paper. The finished prints were laid into the box and a sheet of foam core was paced over them to prevent movement during transportation. Wheels were later added to the bottom of the case, allowing it to be rolled by one person.

During the Fall and Winter quarters I was able to print a collection of images to be edited for the final show. A single 28 by 85 inch print might take a day or two of test strips and trial prints. Time was required for dodging, burning, local color correction, dust removal, and evaluation. Then the finished print was printed, processed, and evaluated.

I determined the negatives would be filed by number and film type. A computer filing system was established using the note book feature of Word Perfect Library software. This allowed me to search a negative by file number, date, subject, film type, word, or a title. Negatives were enclosed in mylar
sleeves within neutral PH paper folders, and stored in archival paper board boxes. The entire archival paper box was sealed in a plastic bag and placed in the deep freeze. Cold storage may slow down the fading of the color dyes within the emulsion.

During the show a criticism I received from my board and fellow students, concerned dust spots on several of the prints. I worked on these while they hung on the wall. Attention to detail would have prevented this shortfall. The rolled 30 by 90 inch prints are unmanageable. Trying to spot on the print requires a large clean space. I decided to dry mount the 30 by 90 inch print onto four foot by eight foot sheets of gater foam board. This was a time consuming operation. The archival dry mounting tissue, board, and print were hard to handle; and expensive. I waited until the last week before the show to mount and trim the 30 by 90 inch prints. This was one of the reasons spotting was not complete. My logic was that the huge mounted prints would be hard to store and handle. I wished to prevent damaging large and cumbersome prints. Prints I made during the last weeks before the show were spotless. I perfected my lab work so spotting was unnecessary. Prints I had made eight months earlier did have slight dust spots.

There were also demands upon my time during the last few weeks prior to the show. At the request of student shows prior to mine the gallery was painted gray. As gallery supervisor I spent several 12 hour days painting. In
addition I had to silk screen posters and invitations, address and mail invitations, plus attend to other duties. For example, as commanding officer of my Marine Corps unit I had to fly with four hundred fellow Marines to North Carolina on 24 hours notice. Without the help of fellow students I would never had completed all the work.
APPENDIX TWO

THESIS PROPOSAL
SIRENS OF THE SHORELINE

BY

Eugene A. Nieminen

THESIS PROPOSAL

May 17, 1988

MFA IMAGING ARTS PROGRAM

SCHOOL OF PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS AND SCIENCES

ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

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Gunther Cartwright, Chair
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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

I will explore the shoreline of the Great Lakes through my senses, intellectual thoughts, memory, physical self, and the photographic process. The resulting work will be a combination of spirituality, man's industry, and nature.

BACKGROUND:

Growing up along the shoreline of Lake Erie, I was conscious of the change down at the water. More so I was conscious of having a vantage point to view the shoreline. I have a strong tie, an attraction to the shoreline and the life man has created upon and around the lakes. People of the shoreline have strong relationships to the lakes and the life they provide. By choice or by chance people of the shoreline are drawn into economic, spiritual, physical, and intellectual ties with the area. There is a coexistence between man and nature. Nature always wins; man thinks he has made a change, only to have the elements of nature sweep it away, from in front of his eyes. Man viewing a lifetime or the history of the recent past thinks he has control, but whatever man builds the lakes can obliterate.

I am conscious of man's impact upon the events and scenery near the water's edge. My memory reflects upon what I see to be physically present and the fragments of the past which beckon me to the water's edge. I was born and
raised in a port city on Lake Erie. My early photographs and memory recall a thriving harbor and river along the shore. There was a boom of ship building, associated with a demand for steel during World War II. The process of ore, steel, and coal, created thriving economy in the area. The period of prosperity followed into my childhood years, the early fifties. During the nineteen fifties shipping on the Great Lakes enjoyed a period of prosperity. My father, as many others, was employed aboard one of the ore freighters sailing these waters. I remember the thriving harbor as a spectacle of sights and sounds.

The seasonal change had a pronounced effect upon the water and people of the shoreline. Fall was the most temperate of all the seasons; it slowly slipped from the warm waters of late summer into a violent display of storms. The waters which had been heating all summer quickly returned to a cold state of winter. The fall meant friendly winds to me, and dangerous conditions to the sailors on the lakes. Winter brought wild wind and violent freezing surf, a deadly and hazardous lake until it froze over. The ice brought the ore freighters into port for the winter. Ore boats would be laid-up in the harbor, their steam boilers cold until the thaw of spring. This season brought my father home from his ship. Together we enjoyed the frozen beaches and snow covered hills.

A sign of spring was the first smoke from laid-up ships in the harbor. Soon ship’s whistles pierced the black smoke raising from the harbor. The loud ship’s whistle were a visible jet of steam in the chilly air. Responding whistle
blasts from tug boats confirmed that the shipping season was starting. There were sounds of bells and sirens of the draw bridges, and on dark damp days, the low bellow of fog horns. There was the ritual of my father bringing out his sea bag and suit case. He would soon be shipping out for another season of employment upon the Great Lakes.

Summer brought the lake to full life. People flocked to the beaches and splashing surf. Continuing into the present, recreation is an important aspect of the lake shore. Situated within the vicinity of the beaches are amusement parks, arcades, hot dog grills, and marinas. Summer cottages and homes are built to collect the ever changing panoramic view of the lake. The ideal sites are on the bluffs over the beaches, where cottages line narrow shady streets reaching toward the lake. It can be a life of sand in the carpet, suntan oil on the door knob, and fun in the sun. Industry and recreation share the use of the lake. Pleasure boats and huge freighters share the use of the water, where one man’s pleasure is another’s work. Contrasting this easy way of life are the storms which transform a magnificent lake into a forbidding area.

PROCEDURE:

I intend to photograph man’s and nature’s coexistence, as I feel a presence, a magnetism and curiosity with the shoreline. Throughout the changing seasons I will travel the shoreline of the Eastern Great Lakes in this
exploration I will photograph the subjects to which I am drawn. I will contemplate my progression, reflect and evaluate, using my memory.

Lake Erie and Lake Ontario provide adequate subject matter. Lake Erie is the most relevant to me, as I grew up along its shore. My requirement for travel will unfold during the exploration stage. Sites along the lakes are repetitions of that which I have known, and situations are connected to the events I know. The shoreline can be photographed near my home in Ashtabula, Ohio, and near Rochester, New York. Traveling by bicycle and auto, I plan to travel the shore. This intimacy will provide immediate access to visual imagery.

I have made contact with a Great Lakes shipping company. There is an opportunity for me to travel aboard a bulk freighter. This opportunity would allow travel to the upper lakes of Superior and Huron. The iron ore towns of the North are tied to my home town by the distribution of this raw material of modern and past industries. My control of this ship board travel is limited, but it will provide a new vantage point. Viewing the shore from the deck of a freighter will stimulate my visual thinking and imagination. This opportunity also provides contact with the crews and people of this industry. My concept of the shoreline will be affected by this process.

I do not intend to provide a documentary of the region; nor do I intend to make the shoreline my god. It is my desire that the work express my interaction with the life of the shoreline. The quality of light is important, as are
the changes of the seasons and time of day. Man's impact upon the lake can not be overlooked. There are areas of the shoreline which appear untouched by man; other landscapes are totally man-made, from man-made mountains to man made clouds. Weather has an effect upon the region, like light, it changes incredibly fast. Time's changes are measured in the mind of an individual, they are not lasting, and are not relevant to a fixed clock; rather, these changes are personal and at times vanishing. I must place myself in a situation ready to capture my image on film. I must allow myself consideration of what is important to me, and capture on film these visions for the eyes and minds of others.

More important than the type of film or camera, is the grasp of the mood, the spirit. I must be able to perceive life off and on the shore, with the whole of nature. I will attempt to work in color and black & white photography. I do not intend to shoot various medium as a duplication process. There is a conscious decision to capture the moment as I see it, using the films which do it best. This requires that I have control of my camera and know my intentions. The control of the photographic process is easy. Film data sheets are available; there are H&D curves to show the response of film to light. What I intend to do is in my mind, based in my past. There is no data sheet of my mind, no graphic plot of my memory, experiences, and intentions toward the image. How
I approach a subject, how I portray a scene shows my association with the subject.

My personal understanding and control require work. I must ask myself questions; where do the images originate from, why do I respond to the subject as I do? Self discovery is part of the image-making process. The treatment of an image continues after the photograph is made. On a gallery wall the photograph alone will confront the viewer; display is important. My exploration and experiences will be contained within frames hanging on the wall. I do not think it possible to explore the shoreline without exploring myself.
APPENDIX THREE
ILLUSTRATIONS
SIRENS OF THE SHORELINE
APRIL 24-29, 1989
R.I.T. FINE ART PHOTOGRAPHY GALLERY

THESIS DEFENSE
APRIL 25, 1989

The photographs were all Kodak Ektacolor prints, dry mounted, with no cover glazing. The prints were not titled, nor were wall labels used.

The following number of prints were exhibited in the R.I.T Fine Art Photographic Gallery.

NUMBER OF PRINTS - SIZE OF PRINTS

13 - 28" by 85"
2 - 85" by 28"
1 - 16" by 48"
3 - 16" by 40"
4 - 9" by 28"
Figure 2.
Figure 3.
Figure 4.
Figure 7.
Figure 8.
Figure 10.

85 x 28 Inch
Figure 11.
Figure 12.
Figure 13.
Figure 15.
Figure 16.
Figure 17.
Figure 19.
Figure 20.
Figure 21.
Figure 22

Installation